



# Tips for

## Grandparents *who are* Raising Grandchildren in Illinois

These simple suggestions have been developed by the Task Force on Grandparents Raising Grandchildren in Illinois to assist older adult caregivers in their efforts to provide quality care for their family's children. The Task Force can be reached through the Illinois Department on Aging's toll-free Senior HelpLine, **1-800-252-8966** (Voice and TTY).

### DEPRESSION

Adults are not the only ones who become depressed. Children and teenagers also may suffer from depression. The behavior of depressed children and teenagers differs from the behavior of depressed adults. The best way to determine if a child is depressed is to arrange for a diagnostic evaluation. Only a licensed physician or psychologist can diagnose a person with a psychiatric disorder. The following is a list of some of the symptoms a doctor will be looking for as part of an evaluation.

- Changes in sleep patterns: too much sleep or difficulty sleeping;
- Changes in appetite: noticeable weight loss or gain;
- Inability to concentrate;
- Feelings of excessive guilt;
- Feelings of hopelessness, sadness;
- Withdrawal from friends and family;
- Changes in activity: slowed movement, monotonous speech or unexplained agitation, fidgeting, pacing, and wringing of hands;
- Loss of energy;
- A sudden drop in school performance;
- Outbursts of shouting or complaining, unexplained irritability;
- Neglect of personal appearance;
- Crying;
- Aggression: refusal to cooperate, antisocial behavior;
- Use of alcohol or other drugs;
- Complaints of aching arms, legs, or stomach when no cause can be found;
- Perception of being ugly when not;
- Loss of interest in activities;
- Feeling that life isn't worth living; recurring thoughts of death or suicide;
- Risk-taking behaviors.

## **How to recognize depression**

In general, depression affects a person's mood, thinking, bodily functions, or behavior, but usually causes a combination of changes. A depressed young person may be visibly sad, blue, or worried, although increased irritability is another common sign. He or she usually loses interest or pleasure in activities, things, or people they once enjoyed, and social withdrawal is common.

Depressed adolescents nearly always experience changes in thinking, although they may be reluctant to admit it. Low self-esteem is common, as are negative thoughts about oneself and the future. A depressed young person may be confused or have difficulty making decisions. He or she may lack energy and motivation for daily tasks, often accompanied by a major drop in school performance. Depression in adolescence is often disguised!

In people of all ages, depression is a condition that should be taken seriously. It can interfere significantly with daily living, social functioning, and general well-being.

## **Starting a treatment program**

Many depressed young people can benefit from a treatment program or, by contacting a professional for advice and help. A family doctor is an excellent person to talk to because he or she is already familiar with the child's health history. Together the young person, their family, and the doctor can arrive at a decision as to what type of treatment program might be most helpful.

For some adolescents, counseling may be the only therapy needed. Counseling that involves not only the young person but his or her family may be beneficial.

## **For more information on depression call:**

National Institute of Mental Health at:

**1-800-421-4211**

or

Illinois Department on Aging's Senior HelpLine at:

**1-800-252-8966 (Voice and TTY)**